

Things Couldn't Get Much Stranger Than This by FireFlashMoon

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Relationships: Eleven/Mike Wheeler, Jonathan Byers/Nancy Wheeler, Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper, Maxine "Max" Mayfield/Lucas Sinclair, Will Byers & Eleven & Dustin Henderson & Maxine "Max" Mayfield & Lucas Sinclair & Mike Wheeler, Will Byers/Mike Wheeler

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Summary:

On a quest with the Party, El becomes victim to a powerful Plane Shift spell and is spirited away to a world without magic, where she meets...herself?

As her party works to get her and help, El and the Other Party discover a conspiracy to unleash the dark forces of the Upside Down to plague both of their worlds once again.

((ON HIATUS))

Things Couldn't Get Much Stranger Than This

Snow crunched under Eleven's feet as she weaved between naked trees, ears pricked for any sound. Wind whistled through the bare boughs and eddies of dead leaves swirled through the dark forest. A fluttering of wings in the trees above made her jump but not bolt; the ground was treacherous and she didn't want to fall in the dark. Her dress, slightly torn at the edges, flapped in the early winter wind and she pulled the denim jacket tighter against the cold.

A crack behind her sent ice up her spine and she span on her heel to face the dark forest. Nothing could be seen in the shadows, but somehow she knew there was something there. And it didn't seem friendly.

She turned and sprinted away, blood rushing in her ears, her breath coming dagger sharp and cold. The thing - whatever it was - came immediately in pursuit and she could tell that it was catching up quickly.

Trees flashed by and she ran and ran and ran, seemingly endless forest stretched on behind and in front of her yet still it followed her.

Then something changed.

The light ahead was different than before, as if was reflected off water. She started to slow down and entering a clearing, the anomaly then presented itself. Suspended before her was a huge black surface, smooth as glass, rippling ever-so-slightly like a disturbed lake. She crept towards it with cautious steps, her pursuer forgotten in her curiosity and confusion.

When she was within ten feet of it, another person appeared in the surface. At first she thought it was her reflection, but as she got closer, the figure grew taller. Clothes that had been identical at a distance morphed into a worn looking nightgown and pyjama pants.

It was barefoot and stood in the snow, apparently with no issue.

She stopped and as did the other girl, only a foot between them both and the odd surface. She looked at the other person, at the curly hair that was the same as her own, ears strangely pointed and eyes shining in a way that no human's could. She blinked slowly and the reflection mimicked it, although with some delay. She put one hand up and was again copied. The doppelgänger stared at her, expression unreadable, and she matched it.

A growl behind her was a sharp reminder of her predicament. She turned towards the noise and backed up, face falling as the horrifyingly familiar figure came close, flower-like mouth open and drooling. Out of the corner of her eye, she could see her double also backing up from another Demodog, although like her own double, there were differences to the other creature. She stepped back again and with a soft thunk her hand hit the surface. It felt like the floor of the dark space felt under her feet - cold and silky, but not making her hand wet despite its water-like quality - and she knew she had reached the end of the line. She tried to push the creature away, but her powers seemed to have left her - nothing happened, even as she threw out her other hand to direct her attack. She screwed her eyes shut, hoping that the dream - if that was what it was - would end, that none of this was real.

Then the cold surface melted away and her hand brushed against another. Without thinking, she clasped the hand in hers. A burst of golden light shot outwards, causing the Demodog to screech in fury and flee from the burning light. A distorted but similar shriek echoed behind her, as the other fled as well. She turned around and looked at her older doppelgänger again, who looked surprised at the reaction their contact had created. The reflection looked at her hand in confusion then at Eleven. Eleven stepped forward and put her hand up again, and her double looked at it then also put hers up, allowing contact to be resumed. The light was slightly weaker, but swirled

about them in glittering ribbons. El giggled and Older-El smiled too.

The moment was ruined by a horrifying screech and both girls flinched, let go of each other's hands and turned in the direction of the sound. More roars echoed through the trees; one Demodog had been scared off but a pack of them wouldn't be so easily shaken. Other-El looked around quickly, then knelt down and clasped her hands again.

"Stay safe, keep running." She smiled then let go. In El's hand was a white flower that glittered like a jewel. El gasped and looked to her double in askance. But by now the surface had sealed up and Other-El gave a brief wave before running into the forest of her side.

Eleven turned around, the flower clasped to her chest. Shadows detached from the trees and morphed into the shape of a half dozen Demodogs. The leader sniffed around, sighted her - or smelled her, as they didn't have any eyes - and its face opened, white teeth sharp and drool dripping from the flower-like maw. It crouched, then lunged, leaping at her face with a blood-chilling screech.

And then Eleven woke up.

El woke up with a start, shooting upright in bed. Her room was dark, which was quickly changed as she flipped the light switch with a twitch of her fingers. No shadows moved, no horrifying Upside-Down creature was poised to strike. She let out a sigh of relief.

A smash made her jump a mile; a plate that had been left on the dresser had fallen - she must have caused it to shake in her panic and

it had dislodged the plate. She swung her legs out of the bed and got up, revealing something that almost knocked her flat. Still held to her chest and glittering in the light from her bedside lamp, was the white flower. It wasn't as luminous as it had appeared in the dream, but still glimmered in a gem-like way. El held it up, turning it in the light, awestruck by the strange plant. It was real. How? El frowned. If the flower was real, then the dream - strange as it was - must be real as well. And the Other Her...

There was a knock on her door. El started and quickly hid the flower under the blankets as Hopper's voice came through.

"You okay kid?"

"Yes."

"Did something break? I heard a crash."

"Yes. It was a plate. I broke it by accident."

Hopper sighed.

"It's okay kid, let me grab a brush." Footsteps moved away from the door, then returned. El undid the latches, keeping herself on the bed and away from the shards littering the floor. Hopper walked in, with an exasperated but fond smile on his face. He immediately got down to sweeping up the plate, El helping by nudging the plate pieces in his direction.

"How'd that happen, then?"

"Had a dream, made the dresser move - it fell and broke." Hopper shook his head.

"Anyway to stop that happening? No?" El shrugged. "Suppose we'll just have to chain everything down." He said with a smile, the attempt at a joke falling a bit flat as he emptied the shards into a bin bag he'd brought with him. He stood up next to her, hesitated, then ruffled her curly hair. El swatted him lightly, mock scowling before grinning.

"So this dream of yours. Was it a bad dream?" El shook her head.

"Not bad, no. Just...strange."

"Strange. Strange how?" El frowned. Should she tell him?

"Forgot." She felt guilty for lying but it was probably nothing anyway, no need to worry him over it. Hopper sighed and scrubbed at his face with a hand

"Right. Well that's good," He paused "I think." He caught a glimpse of the clock and winced.

"Ah shit, it's two in the morning?" El looked at the clock then back to him and nodded. "Right, you've got Steve coming over to babysit you tomorrow and he's brought some stuff for you to catch up with. If you get everything done, maybe, just maybe, you can go to the arcade with Mike and the others." El beamed at him and he fought the smile that would have overtaken his face; he was trying to be Stern Dad. "You have to get your work done, mind."

"Do you want a drink of water? Anything you need?" El shook her head. "Right, get back to sleep then." El huffed and Hopper chuckled, then left the room.

"You go to sleep too!" El shouted after him. She heard him give a dramatic sigh, before the sound of the soap on TV cut out.

"Night, kid."

"Night Hop."

The door swung close and the lock slid back into place. El snuggled back into bed, then took the flower out again. It was a puzzle, for sure. But Other Her seemed nice. Like an old friend. She put the flower on the bedside table, got comfy, then shut her eyes.

Maybe she'd see her again, in another dream.

El blinked at the wooden ceiling, then sat upright. The moon cast silver ribbons across the floor, dust spiralling in the light. Only the creak of the old cabin's wooden supports could be heard with her elven ears; the house was silent and asleep.

El sighed and swung her legs out of bed, feet sinking into the soft rug. She shivered in the early morning chill and slid into the slippers and pulled her dressing gown from the hook across the room, pulling it on in a swift motion. The door creaked open and she padded into the main room, where moonlight filtered through a curtain onto the floorboards. She walked to the largest curtain and pulled it open slightly, pushing herself up onto the window seat. Outside a light sprinkling of snow was dusted across the ground and the last of the leaves far above swayed and danced in the soft breeze. El pulled her knees up to her chin and thought about her dream. Being stalked, meeting the Other Her, how they had scared off the Demostalkers by breaking the barrier. She had even given her the flower - a gift from Mike she had fallen asleep holding - and had woken up with it missing. She had heard stories of dreams allowing for travel that the waking world could not allow. Had it been the past? No, the Other Her had been human, she could tell. A descendant, from a vision of the future? Possibly, but she sensed that it had been her and not someone that looked like her. Maybe some malevolent dream creature? El had decent *Insight* and as far as she could tell the doppelgänger had seemed benign, though they could have hidden their motives better than she could sense them-

"Room for one more?" El startled and her head snapped towards the voice, peering through the curtains. Standing barefoot in the kitchen, two steaming mugs of hot chocolate in his hands, was Will. She sighed with relief and at the same time a number of items from around the room - including 3 books and a chair - fell from midair where she had grabbed them in surprise.

They both winced at the noise.

"Sorry for scaring you, I thought you knew I was there." He gave her a wan smile and offered her the mug lavished with cream and marshmallows; El's sweet tooth was well documented and had not weakened over the years, no matter Hopper's efforts. She accepted it, then shuffled over to give her step-brother room. He sat on the cushioned surface, legs crossed and hands wrapped around a much less extravagant cup.

They both stared into the late Marpenoth morning.

El looked out the corner of her eye at Will and hid a grimace in sip of chocolate; he looked like shit. His skin was ashen, the lines of old scars thrown into sharp relief and his eyes were purpled by lack of sleep - anyone would think he'd been punched in the face.

"You look like death warmed up." Will snorted into his mug,

"Gee, thanks." He said, sarcasm layered thick but grinning nonetheless. "You're looking as radiant as ever, even at two in the morning. I swear, you could drag an elf through a mud puddle and they'd still look like a runway model." El flicked his ear and he poked her in the ribs, both of them laughing quietly, mindful of the other sleeping residents.

"Couldn't sleep?" El asked at length and Will shook his head with a weak smile.

"With Wheeler and Roberta hogging the bed? How could I?" El smirked slightly, remembering nights where Mike had accidentally shoved her out of bed, back when they'd been a thing.

"Real reason?"

"There's no other reason-" he was cut off by El's expression. She scowled and poked his forehead.

"Friends don't lie." Will groaned.

"You gotta start pulling a new card, that one only has do much mileage." He said, with a laugh, dragging a hand down his face.

"Y'know what, fine. If I can't talk to you about it, who can I? I love Mike and Mom and Jonathan and everyone, but they smother me so much sometimes. If I told them about this it'd just worry them. Especially so close to the anniversary..." He ran a hand through his hair and sighed heavily while El waited.

"I keep having weird dreams. They feel so real, like it's real life, like I'm awake when they happen."

"Like Now-Memories?" Will shuddered and appeared to turn even paler. A hand ghosted over a spot on his abdomen, the scar long since healed but the memory of the white hot pain and the feeling of everything slipping away was still ever present in his mind, even seven years on.

"No, no, Pelor no. It feels, uh, like, maybe the future?" El gave him a questioning look and Will shrugged.

"I don't know why, it just does. But it doesn't make any sense. It's not clear, like I'm wearing someone's glasses. And when I try to focus, it hurts my eyes."

"What can you see?" Will leant his chin on his knee and sighed.

"It'll sound stupid."

"Tell me anyway." El said, sliding an arm around him. He fiddled with his foot hair for a brief moment.

"It's us. The party. Y'know, back when we were small and annoying. They're walking in the forest, it's almost dusk, but they seem fine. Then, behind them," he looked up at her. "Well, it's you. But your human? And Steve's there too, but it's a younger Steve. He still has his arm. Then that melted away and suddenly it was just little me. On his own. And there's something there, I'm not sure, I can't see it and neither can he I think but I don't know. And then he's running and I'm running too and we run into each other."

El's eyes widened; she hid her expression by looking out into the forest again, but her heart beat faster at the information. Will had also had a dream about a doppelgänger of himself? It wasn't a pattern, not yet, but it seemed too impossible to be pure coincidence.

"What happened next?" She whispered. Will shook his head and gave a rueful smile.

"Nothing. Everything blurred out and I fell back into the usual nightmares." El squeezed his shoulder and Will returned the half hug. "Don't worry, they're getting better." He frowned. "Well, less bad is probably more accurate, it's still pretty shit." He turned to her again, looking slightly puzzled. "Why're you up then?" El shrugged.

"Just woke up, couldn't get back to sleep." Will hummed in understanding, leaning on her shoulder. The two of them stared out into the forest again.

He sat up a little straighter suddenly, and El looked at him in askance.

"I just remembered! Mike's planned this awesome day out for you two tomorrow, and here I am keeping you up." El shook her head.

"No you weren't. I was going to be up a long time anyway. We'll both go back to bed." Will nodded but still looked guilty. El took their empty mugs and deposited them in the sink, before returning and holding out an arm for Will.

"Come on." He took it with some reluctance and she began herding her brother to his room.

His familiar had taken up pride of place on his pillow and Mike had managed to starfish over most of the bed, his growth spurt making the gangly moon elf's legs stick out of the covers. El shoved Mike over a little, then pushed Will back into bed. Will looked rather resistant to the idea of going back to sleep, vaguely panicked even, until an arm that had been bent against the headboard wrapped around him as Mike hugged him in his sleep. Will blinked then laughed softly as

his boyfriend nuzzled into his neck. He snuggled up closer to him and finally closed his eyes, ever-present worry lines fading slightly as he fell asleep. Roberta, his pseudodragon, woke up and curled up in a ball on his chest, purring softly.

El smiled at the scene, glad he was comfortable. She dismissed *Sleep* from her mind; Will hadn't needed it tonight and real sleep was often much better than the enchanted sleep he was regularly saddled with.

She made her way to bed, her thoughts returning to her dream. She wasn't sure why she hadn't mentioned it to Will, considering what his dream had been about, but it hadn't felt like the right time. Maybe it was coincidence, that they'd both met a double?

She got back into bed and closed her eyes.

Perhaps. But when, in their lives, had anything been as simple as a coincidence?

Author's Note:

So this is my first dip into writing Stranger Things fic. Yay!

I'm using 5e D&D rules as a guideline for this but some of it will be cobbled together from other things.

Comments are welcomed and highly appreciated!

I'm on tumblr as dewdropstar if you want to ask me anything